Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

LGBTQI+ Persecution: The Global Genocide of Gay People

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Although Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) people are not a protected group under the Genocide Convention, Raphael Lemkin's definition of genocide recognizes their intentional destruction as genocide. Nazis rounded up LGBTQI+ people and sent them to the same death camps as Jews. Genocide Watch believes that Lemkin was right to include their destruction as genocide. Cultural or state-led killings of gay people constitute **Stage 9: Extermination** in Genocide Watch's Ten Stages of Genocide.

Sixty-seven countries still criminalize same-sex relations, and fourteen criminalize transgender and gender diverse people. States that actively target LGBTQI+ people often persecute other social groups as well.

Death penalties for gay sex are enforced in several Middle Eastern countries. **Iran** has executed thousands of gay people since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. **Iran** differs from most countries with anti-gay laws by authorizing "gender reassignment." Gay Iranians are forced through this process to "cure" their sexuality, with up to 4,000 surgeries reportedly carried out each year. After surgery, people are often shunned by their families. Many turn to sex work to support themselves.

Areas controlled by religious fundamentalist groups can be deadly for LGBTQI+ people. **Saudi Arabia** punishes gay sex in some cases with death by stoning. In **Somalia**, Al-Shabaab uses Sharia Law as justification to execute people for gay sex. In **Iraq**, militias rounded up and killed gay people in 2009. The Islamic State executed gay people in **Iraq and Syria** until its defeat in 2019. Al-Qaeda has killed gay men in **Yemen**. In **Afghanistan,** the Taliban killed gay men in a "wall-toppling" execution in 2015. The Taliban's Sharia court system ran parallel to the state judicial system. Since regaining power in Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban has targeted LGBTQI+ people and has openly threatened to exterminate them.

The death penalty for gay sex is technically in place in **11 countries** but not enforced in all these countries. **Yemen**, **Mauritania**, **Pakistan**, **the United Arab Emirates**, **Brunei**, and **Qatar** are countries where the death penalty is still legally in place but not known to have been enforced. **Northern Nigeria** is another area with Sharia law that does not execute gay people. But in July 2022, a Sharia court sentenced gay men to death. A 2014 anti-gay law hardened sentences across all of **Nigeria**.

In 2019, a global outcry pressured **Brunei** to cancel plans to enforce the death penalty by stoning for gay sex. **Uganda's** parliament just passed a bill imposing life sentences for people who identify as gay and the death sentence for certain cases of "aggravated homosexuality." The Constitutional Court overturned a similar "Kill the Gays" law in 2014, but hate crimes against gay people increased. Christian groups from the United States have promoted homophobia in Uganda. Ghana has proposed an anti-LGBTQI+ law.

In 2017, **Chechnya** in the **Russian Federation** had a "gay purge." The state rounded up and tortured gay people and encouraged "honor killings." French activists filed a complaint at the International Criminal Court accusing Chechnya of genocide. Russia persecutes LGBTQI+ people. In 2016, **Tanzania** began an LGBTQI+ crackdown, though the situation seems to have improved since 2021. Globally, LGBTQI+ persecution is fueled by descriptions of homosexuality as 'Western barbarism' and a 'virus' that people should 'kill.'

Britain punished gay sex with death until 1861 and spread homophobia globally along with other European colonizers. African and Asian societies were overall more tolerant of gay sex. Many countries have been repealing colonial-era anti-gay laws. **Sudan** lifted the death penalty for gay sex in 2020.

Genocide Watch urges the United Nations (UN) to continue to advocate for the global abolition of the death penalty and the decriminalization of LGBTQI+ sexual relations in all countries.